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HERMANN STIEFFEL, SOLDIER-ARTIST OF THE WEST

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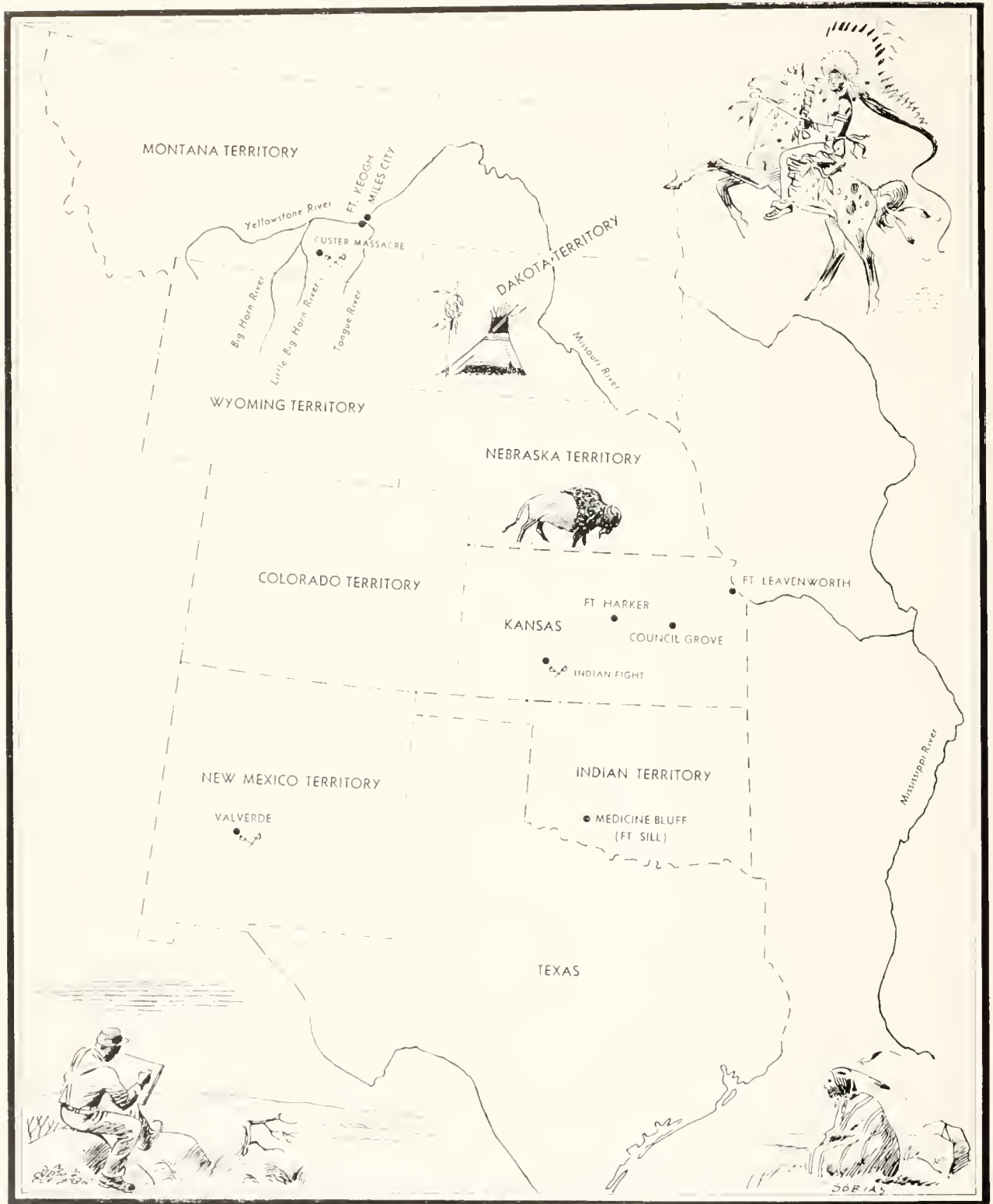


Figure 1. Area in which Hermann Stieffel served with Company K, 5th U.S. Infantry, 1858-1882.

By Edgar M. Howell

Hermann Stieffel, Soldier Artist of the West

A number of gifted artists painted the West and the colorful Indian-fighting army of the post-Civil-War period, but since none of these were military men their work lacked the viewpoint that only a soldier could provide.

German-born Hermann Stieffel, for 24 years a private in the U.S. Infantry, painted a series of water colors while serving in the Indian country in the 1860's and 1870's. Although Stieffel could never be called talented, and certainly was untutored as an artist, his unusually canny eye for the colorful and graphic and his meticulous attention to detail have given us valuable pictorial documentaries on the West during the Indian wars.

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THE AMERICAN WEST has never wanted for artists with a high sense of the documentary. Through the talented hands of men like George Catlin, Carl Bodmer and Alfred Jacob Miller, Frederick Remington, and the cowboy painter Charles M. Russell the trans-Mississippi regions have been pictured as have few other areas on earth.¹ From

¹ For George Catlin, Gustavus Sohon, and George Gibbs, see: John C. Ewers, "Gustavus Sohon's Portraits of Flathead and Pend d'Oreille Indians, 1854," *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections*, vol. 110, no. 7, 1948; "George Catlin, Painter of Indians and the West," in *Annual Report of the . . . Smithsonian Institution . . . 1955, 1956*, pp. 483-528; Marvin C. Ross, *George Catlin, Episodes from Life Among the Indians and Last Rambles*, Norman, Okla., Univ. Oklahoma Press, 1959; Harold McCracken, *George Catlin and the Old Frontier*, New York, Dial Press, 1959; David I. Bushnell, Jr., "Drawings by George

historical and ethnological standpoints these men made tremendous and timeless contributions to our American heritage. But the West held an esthetic fascination for the untutored and less talented as well, and not a few soldiers, miners, stage drivers, and just plain adventurers recorded their impressions on paper

Gibbs in the Far Northwest, 1849-1851," *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections*, vol. 97, no. 8, 1938.

For Alfred Jacob Miller, see: Bernard DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri*, Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1947; Marvin C. Ross, editor, *The West of Alfred Jacob Miller*, Norman, Okla., Univ. Oklahoma Press, 1951.

For Frederick Remington and Charles Russell, see: Harold McCracken, *Frederick Remington, Artist of the Old West*, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1947, and *The Charles M. Russell Book: the Life and Work of the Cowboy Artist*, Garden City, Doubleday, 1957.



Attack on Genl Marcy's Train

*Escorted by Co. K, 5th U.S. Inf. by Brevet Major D. H. Brotherton Commanding
Near Pawnee Fort, Kan. Sep. 23, 1867.*

Figure 2.—Attack on General Marcy's train near Pawnee Fort, Kansas, September 23, 1867. The train was escorted by Company K, 5th U.S. Infantry, Brevet Major D. H. Brotherton commanding. (USNM 384185; Smithsonian photo 38986-A.)

and canvas. Crude though many of these works are, they are nonetheless significant, for they are a graphic record of what these men saw, where they lived, and what they did, in many cases the only record of particular places and events, for the camera of L. A. Huffman and his colleagues did not come into its own until the late 1870's.² Without them we would have no description, graphic or otherwise, of much of the West both before and after the Civil War—the early trading posts and forts, the Oregon, Santa Fe, and Overland Trails, the Bozeman Trail, the stage stations, all of which played a part in the opening and development of the West.³

² See: Mark H. Brown and W. R. Felton, *The Frontier Years. L. A. Huffman, Photographer of the Plains*, New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1955; Martin F. Schmitt and Dee Brown, *Fighting Indians of the West*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948.

³ An excellent group of these crude on-the-spot drawings and paintings is reproduced in Grace Raymond Hebard and E. A. Brininstool, *The Bozeman Trail*, 2 vols., Cleveland, The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1922.

In 1946 the heirs of Lt. Col. David H. Brotherton, U.S. Army, an Indian-fighting officer of many years experience on the frontier, donated to the United States National Museum a collection⁴ comprising a number of Sioux Indian specimens, including a Model 1866 Winchester carbine said to have been surrendered in 1881 to Colonel Brotherton by the Sioux chief, Sitting Bull, and ten water colors by a German-born private soldier, Hermann Stieffel of Company K, 5th U.S. Infantry. Nine of these paintings (the tenth being a view of Rattenberg in the Tyrol Alps) are photographically reproduced herein. They constitute an unusually graphic and colorful, if somewhat unartistic, series of documentaries on the West of the post-Civil-War Indian fighting period.

It can be surmised that Brotherton obtained the paintings from Stieffel, for from 1861 to 1879 he

⁴ No. 173740 in the U.S. National Museum.

commanded the infantry company in which the latter spent the entire 24 years of his Army career. Brotherton's career itself is an interesting sidelight on the West of the period and an excellent if somewhat sad commentary on the promotion system in the Army during a period when the development of the West was so heavily dependent on the Army's curbing Indian depredations.

Brotherton was graduated from the U.S. Military Academy with the class of 1854 along with several officers who later distinguished themselves in the Confederate States Army, including George Washington Custis Lee, son of Robert E. Lee, John Pegram, J. E. B. Stuart, Stephen D. Lee, and William Dorsey Pender.⁵ Assigned to the 5th Infantry, Brotherton by 1861 had risen to the rank of captain and had acquired considerable experience against the Comanches and Apaches in the Southwest, the Seminoles in Florida, and the Mormons in Utah. Electing to remain with his regiment at the outbreak of the Civil War rather than resign and enter a volunteer or militia unit where he easily might have risen to general rank as did so many of his contemporaries, he remained a captain in the Army until 1879 when a vacancy occurred and he was promoted to major. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel in 1883 after 29 years of service, but only at the expense of transferring from his old regiment to the 7th Infantry, where there was a vacancy at that rank. He retired for disability in 1885 after 30 years of almost constant service in the field.

We know little of Stieffel the man. He was born in Wiesbaden, Germany, in 1826, and became a printer by trade, indicating a fair amount of education. He emigrated to this country at an unknown date and in December 1857 at New York City enlisted in the Army as a private of infantry. He was 31 years old at the time, and was described as being five feet five and one-half inches tall with blue eyes, sandy hair, and a fair complexion.⁶ He remained a private for the

entire time of his military service. After recruit training at a general depot, he was assigned to Company K, 5th Infantry, joining that unit late in August 1858 at Camp Floyd (later Fort Crittenden), Utah Territory, where the regiment was an element of Col. Albert Sidney Johnston's "Army of Utah" sent westward to police the recalcitrant Mormons.⁷

Stieffel's record shows nothing of note until December 1859 when he was court-martialed and fined.⁸ This court-martial seemed to set the pace for him. Although the precise charge on which he was tried is not stated, in view of his later record it can be surmised that it was for drunkenness—a very common offense in the frontier army—for in October 1861 Stieffel owed a sutler \$27.95, a heavy debt for a day when a private's net pay was less than \$11.00 a month.⁹ The debt remained unpaid through 1862 and even increasing an additional \$15.00. During this period Stieffel also was in confinement on a number of occasions for crimes or misdemeanors unspecified.¹⁰

In 1860 the 5th Infantry was transferred from Utah southward to the Department of New Mexico. It was here in 1862 that Stieffel saw his first combat in Col. E. R. S. Canby's¹¹ Union force, which frustrated the wild Confederate attempt under Brig. Gen. H. H. Sibley to invade the present states of New Mexico and Arizona and conquer California.¹² Captain Brotherton, Private Stieffel, and the remainder of Company K fought in the sharp action at Valverde, New Mexico, on February 21, 1862, and evidently

⁷ Theo F. Rodenbough and William L. Haskin, *The Army of the United States*, New York, Maynard, Merrill & Co., 1896, pp. 471-472; Remarks on Muster Roll, Company K, 5th Infantry (hereinafter cited as Muster Roll, Co. K), August 31, 1858, Adjutant General's Records, National Archives, Washington.

⁸ Muster Roll, Co. K, *op. cit.* (footnote 7), December 31, 1859.

⁹ In 1861 a private's pay was \$13.00 per month with \$2.00 withheld until expiration of his enlistment and \$.12½ withheld for support of the U.S. Soldiers' Home at Washington. (*U.S. Army Regulations*, 1861.)

¹⁰ Muster Roll, Co. K, *op. cit.* (footnote 7), October 31, 1861; December 31, 1861; April 30, 1862; June 30, 1862; December 31, 1862; February 28, 1863; April 30, 1863; February 28, 1864; June 30, 1864.

¹¹ Canby was murdered by the Modoc Captain Jack in 1873 while engaged in a peace conference.

¹² For details of these operations, see: *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 130 vols., Washington, War Department, 1880-1901, ser. 1, vol. 9, pp. 487-522.

⁵ The information on Brotherton's career has been culled from: *Register of Graduates and Former Cadets United States Military Academy, 1802-1946*, New York, The West Point Alumni Foundation, Inc., 1946; Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army*, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1903, vol. 1; George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy*, Boston, 1891-1930, vol. 3.

⁶ Enlistment papers of Hermann Stieffel dated December 17, 1857, Adjutant General's Records, National Archives, Washington.



Figure 3. —Satanta addressing the peace commissioners at Council Grove, Medicine Lodge Creek, Kansas. (U.S.V.M. 384183; Smithsonian photo 38298.)

with some distinction as Brotherton was breveted major for gallantry as a result of his unit's performance.¹³ Unfortunately for posterity, Stieffel did not record his impressions of this little-known sideshow of the Civil War.

The Battle of Valverde was Stieffel's only experience in formal combat so far as the record shows. After the final withdrawal of Sibley's force into Texas whence it had come, the 5th Infantry turned its hand to policing the Indians and was almost constantly in the field during the period 1863–1866.¹⁴ Stieffel, however, was seldom with his unit during this time. When not on one of his frequent stays in the stockade,

he was on extra duty at the closest army hospital.¹⁵ He continued on such duty for most of the remainder of his service,¹⁶ except for confinements, a period of desertion, and necessary changes of station.

Stieffel's exact unofficial status in Company K over the years is difficult to account for. It is possible, though hardly probable, that Captain Brotherton had developed a friendship with the German, which might account for both his acquisition of the paintings and Stieffel's extra-duty tours. But such is doubtful. Brotherton was a hardened professional officer in an era when there was a far wider gap between officer and enlisted man than exists today. There is no evidence that Stieffel was a shirker. At the end of

¹³ *Ibid.*, ser. 1, vol. 47, pt. 2, p. 1246.

¹⁴ Rodenbough and Haskin, *op. cit.* (footnote 7), p. 472; Muster Roll, Co. K, *op. cit.* (footnote 7), April 30, 1863; June 30, 1864; October 31, 1865.

¹⁵ The first note of such duty is in Muster Roll, Co. K, *op. cit.* (footnote 7), February 28, 1863.

¹⁶ See Muster Roll, Co. K, *op. cit.* (footnote 7), 1863–1882. The muster rolls were submitted bimonthly.



Camp of the Peace Commissioners
at Medicine Lodge Creek

Figure 4.—Camp of the peace commissioners at Medicine Lodge Creek, Kansas.
(USNM 384184; Smithsonian photo 38298-A.)

each enlistment he reenlisted and always in Company K, and such reenlistment was subject to the company commander's veto. It is probable that he was not a particularly good soldier. But after the Civil War an army career in the ranks held little glamor for the average young man and recruiting officers were hard put to keep the ranks even partially filled, too often being forced to take what they could get. The most plausible explanation is that since every unit in the Army, then as today, was constantly called on for extra-duty men, the company first sergeant just as constantly selected the apparently agreeable Stieffel as the person whose absence was least likely to weaken the combat readiness of the company. The arrangement must have suited Brotherton, for he allowed it to continue for years. It obviously suited Stieffel, for once he was placed more or less permanently on such detail his periods of confinement ceased. Hospital duty in that day and age was hardly arduous, and the discipline was light. Also, it provided 25 cents a

day extra pay. Thus, this duty gave Stieffel time to paint and, if our surmise is correct, both the time and the money for him to indulge his thirst. In any case, we are indebted to this light duty that gave him the opportunity to paint.

In September 1867 Company K left New Mexico for Fort Harker, Kansas, in the Department of the Missouri, as escort for Brig. Gen. R. B. Marey, an old member of the 5th Infantry who was acting as inspector general for troop units west of the Mississippi. On that march of something more than 500 miles the column was sharply attacked near Fort Dodge on the Arkansas River by a large force of Cheyenne believed led by Black Kettle, and Stieffel had his second and last taste of combat. The action must have impressed him, for it furnished the subject of the first of his paintings (fig. 2). From Fort Harker, Company K escorted the Indian peace commissioners to Council Grove on Big Medicine Lodge Creek for their treaty meeting with the Kiowas, Apaches, Comanches, Chey-



The Wichita Mountains from the Medicine Bluffs in Terr

Figure 5.—The Wichita Mountains from Medicine Bluffs, Indian Territory.
(USNM 384188; Smithsonian photo 42880.)

enne, and Arapahoes in October. This historic meeting Stieffel witnessed and depicted with considerable color and attention to detail (figs. 3, 4).

After another period of hospital duty at Fort Harker (figs. 6, 7), Stieffel went in the field, for what appears to have been the last time, as a member of a wagon-train escort to Medicine Bluff, Indian Territory (present day Oklahoma), where General Sheridan was establishing Fort Sill on the southern edge of the Wichita Mountains.¹⁷ This picturesque overhang of Medicine Bluff Creek, a small tributary of the Red River, was the subject of one of Stieffel's landscapes and perhaps his finest single work (fig. 5).

After this brief interlude in the wilderness, Stieffel went back to his hospital work. Then in September

1873, following a change of station for Company K from Harker to Fort Leavenworth, he went in desertion until the following May, being restored to duty upon his return, rather strangely, without trial but with loss of pay for the period of his absence.¹⁸ The only possible explanation for this leniency in a period when court-martial sentences tended to severity could be that since extra-duty men had to be furnished, Stieffel was worth more to the company out of the stockade than in. With Indian unrest increasing every man counted.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, December 31, 1869; September 30, 1873; June 30, 1874.

¹⁸ Company K was almost at full strength at the time, mustering 58 enlisted men of the 60 authorized. *Ibid.*, September 30, 1873; *Official Army Register for January 1874*, Washington, Adjutant General's Office, 1874, p. 260b.



Figure 6.— Fort Harker, Kansas; east side. (*USNM 384187; Smithsonian photo 42895.*)

Following the Custer massacre on June 25, 1876, all posts in the Department of the Missouri were virtually stripped of troops, among them the 5th Infantry, and dispatched to the Department of Dakota in an all-out attempt to bring the rampaging Sioux under control. But Stieffel saw no action in the campaigns that followed. He was sick²⁰ and was left behind on July 12 when Company K left Leavenworth for the northwest for five years of almost continuous campaigning including numerous actions with the Sioux and the campaign against the gifted Indian tactician, Chief Joseph, and his Nez Percé. We could wish that Stieffel had been present during the Nez Percé campaign, for he might have pictured for us Nelson Miles and the 5th Infantry taking the surrender of Joseph in the Bear Paw Mountains at the end of his

²⁰ Muster Roll, Co. K, *op. cit.* (footnote 7), August 31, 1876.

epochal 1,600-mile running fight.²¹

Stieffel remained at Fort Leavenworth until 1877 when he rejoined his regiment at Cantonment Tongue River, Montana Territory, renamed Fort Keogh in 1879. At Keogh he was again placed on hospital extra-duty and so remained until he was discharged June 23, 1882,²² on a surgeon's certificate of disability. After his discharge he retired to the Soldier's Home in Washington where he died on December 14, 1886, at the age of 60. He was buried in the National

²¹ Frederick Remington has pictured this surrender for us, but he was not an eye witness.

²² Muster Roll, Co. K, *op. cit.* (footnote 7), August 31, 1878, to June 30, 1882; Certificate of Disability for Discharge, Private Hermann Stieffel, April 8, 1882, Adjutant General's Records, National Archives. The date of June 23, given on the Muster Roll, was apparently that on which the discharge received final approval in Washington.

Cemetery on the Soldiers' Home grounds.²³

Stieffel painted three scenes of Fort Keogh and vicinity— one of the fort itself, one of Miles City across the Tongue River, and a landscape of the Yellowstone River near Miles City (figs. 8-10).

The Paintings

Chronologically, the first of the paintings (fig. 2) is that of the Indian attack on General Marcy's train escorted by Company K on September 23, 1867. This attack took place on the Arkansas River about nine miles west of Cimarron Crossing, Kansas. It was an insignificant action as such, similar to hundreds of other such fights in the West, but, in the days of wet-plate photography and low-speed camera shutters, the painting is significant as a rare eye-witness drawing and tells us far more than might any written description. General Marcy's report is somewhat cursory:

Yesterday at about 9 o'clock a.m. as we were approaching a bluff near the Arkansas River thirty-five miles above here we suddenly discovered a great many Indians approaching us from various different directions. I immediately halted our train and after arranging our escort in proper order for action went forward. The Indians circled around us at full speed firing as they ran but did not come very near us. I would not allow our men to fire at the long range, believing that the Indians would come nearer but they did not. Some of the men fired and it is believed that two were wounded as groups collected around them. They wounded Lt. Williams severely in the leg and one soldier who has since died.

Near the point where the affair occurred was a large train of wagons en route to New Mexico with valuable freight. The train had two hundred mules driven off by the Indians about twelve days ago, and it had been guarded by twenty-five men since, and it is probable that the Indians were there for the purpose of capturing the train as they had been firing into it previous to our arrival.²⁴

Stieffel tells us much more in his painting. Upon being attacked the train has pulled off the road, visible in the left foreground, and corralled. The

horses remain hitched, witness to the suddenness of the attack. That the Indians did not venture overly close, as stated by Marcy, is indicated by the fact that Brotherton's men have not been forced to take cover behind the wagons. That the Indians appear closer than Marcy indicates is due to the artist's lack of perspective. They are firing muzzle-loading rifles, several men being in the act of ramming home charges. Stieffel is doubtless correct in this detail. The Chief of Ordnance reported in October 1867 that nearly all the infantry in the Departments of the Missouri and the Platte had been issued breech-loaders.²⁵ It seems more than probable that Company K, in transit as it was from the distant Department of New Mexico, had never seen the new weapons.

In the matter of uniform, Stieffel may have been indulging his fancy somewhat when he pictured the men as wearing the long frock coat and black campaign hat. A miscellany of dress with the short fatigue jacket and kepi predominating would seem far more reasonable for an outfit which had just finished six rough years in the desert Southwest and was even then nearing the end of a 500-mile march. The artist, as did most observers of the period, has patently overestimated the number of Indians who must have carried firearms in the attack. Fully 50 percent or more of the Indians are pictured as so armed, a point which—understandable as it may be in the case of an observer participating in what may well have been his first Indian fight—is not borne out by the record. In the Fetterman Massacre of the previous December, of the 81 white men killed only six bore gunshot wounds,²⁶ and the best evidence indicates that the force which overwhelmed Custer on the Little Big Horn River in 1876 was at least 50 percent armed with bow and arrow.²⁷ Then again, General Marcy's report would seem to bear this out. Had the Indians been well armed, the freight wagon train, which Stieffel pictures corralled in the right background, could hardly have held out for twelve days against a force estimated at 300 or more warriors

²³ *Report of Chief of Ordnance, 1867*, Washington, War Department, 1868.

²⁴ George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Chryenne*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915, p. 235.

²⁵ Frazier and Robert Hunt, *I Fought With Custer: The Story of Sergeant Windolph*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947, p. 92. For an excellent discussion of Indian armament at this period, see John E. Parsons and John S. DuMont, *Firearms in the Custer Battle*, Harrisburg, The Stackpole Company, 1953.



Figure 7.—Fort Harker, Kansas; south side. (USNM 384186; Smithsonian photo 38986.)

defended by only 25 men, at least a part of whom were Mexicans described by Marcy as badly frightened.²⁸ The soldier in the center background making a dash for the corralled wagons is probably a flanker cut off by the sudden attack, possibly the Lt. Williams who was wounded, since only officers in the infantry were mounted. The group of Indians around the fire (in the right centerground) cannot be accounted for.

Stieffel's two pictures of the meeting of the Government's peace commissioners with the Indians at the general tribal rendezvous on Big Medicine Lodge Creek in October 1867 (figs. 3, 4) are his most important from a historical standpoint, especially the one of Satanta, the Kiowa chief, addressing the meeting.²⁹

²⁸ Marcy's report, *op. cit.* (footnote 24).

²⁹ Jack Howland, artist for *Harper's Weekly*, also pictured Satanta speaking to the commissioners, and with more accuracy in that all the civilian commissioners are visible, but his pictures lack the color and drama of Stieffel's work. See: *Harper's Weekly*, November 16, 1867.

Indian unrest during and immediately after the Civil War caused by the ever-increasing white migration to the West had grown to such proportions that in 1867 the Congress launched an all-out effort to establish a lasting peace on the frontier. The plan was to persuade the warring tribes to sign treaties whereby they would move onto reservations where they would be undisturbed by the whites and, in turn, would cease to molest the frontier settlements.³⁰ The Indians concerned with the Medicine Lodge treaty were the Kiowa, Comanche, Apache, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe. This treaty is unusually important, as it changed the entire status of these tribes from that of independence with free and unrestricted range over the entire plains area to that of dependence on the Government with confinement to the limits of a

³⁰ The records of this treaty meeting are contained in the Office of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives. The final treaties are reproduced in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1903, pp 754-764.



FORT KEOGH, MONTANA. (U.S.N.M. 384189; Smithsonian photo 37925.)

Figure 8.—Fort Keogh, Montana. (U.S.N.M. 384189; Smithsonian photo 37925.)

reservation with constant civilian and military supervision. For the Indians it was the beginning of the end.

Upon its arrival at Fort Harker following the action of September 23, Company K had been assigned as escort for the commissioners, thus Stieffel's presence at Council Grove. It was a colorful gathering, with some 5,000 Indians on hand. First came a series of speeches. Then the treaty was drawn up and explained to the Indians. They were to retire to assigned reservations, cease attacking the whites, and permit railroads to be built across the plains. In return the reservations were to be closed to the white buffalo hunters and the tribes were to be issued certain annuities and provided with farming implements, seeds, churches, and schools. In short, the Indians were to be forced to "walk the white man's road."

When the turn came for the Indians to reply, several chiefs responded, the most notable being the Kiowa chief, Satanta, or "White Bear" (fig. 11), one

of the most remarkable individuals in his tribe's history. Speaking for all, Satanta made an unusually strong impression on most of those present, Stieffel among them, for this is the incident which he chose to depict³¹ (fig. 3).

Satanta is pictured in the act of speaking to the commissioners, three of whom can be identified as the military members, Generals Terry, Augur, and Harney from left to right,³² plus one of the civilian commissioners, possibly N. G. Taylor, Commissioner of Indian Affairs. A daring and successful warrior, Satanta's eloquence and vigor of expression had already won for him the title "Orator of the Plains." Every feature on his strong face, every line, showed

³¹ There are several accounts of this. The best, in the opinion of the writer, is in James Mooney's "Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians," *17th Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1898, pp 181-186, 206-210.

³² See photo taken at later date by Alexander Gardner, Still Picture Branch, National Archives.



Miles City Montana

Figure 9.—Miles City, Montana. (USNM 384190; Smithsonian photo 37925-B.)

his character—a forceful, untamable savage of a tribe as well known for its lack of honor, gratitude, and general reliability as for its bravery.³³ With great dignity and impact he first denounced bitterly and scornfully the killing for mere sport of a number of buffalo near the council site by some troopers of the 7th Cavalry:

Has the white man become a child, that he should recklessly kill and not eat? When the red men slay game, they do so that they may live and not starve.

In direct relation to the treaty, he continued with obvious sincerity:

I love the land and the buffalo . . . I don't want any of the medicine lodges [schools and churches] within the country. I want the children raised as I was . . . I have heard that you intend to settle us on a reservation near the mountains. I don't want to settle. I love to roam over the prairies. There I am free and happy, but when

³³ An interesting sidelight on Satanta: In the spring of 1867 he accepted a complete general officer's uniform from General Hancock at Fort Dodge and reciprocated shortly afterwards by attacking the post while decked out in his new dress.

we settle down we grow pale and die . . . A long time ago this land belonged to our fathers; but when I go up to the river I see camps of soldiers on its banks. These soldiers cut down my timber; they kill my buffalo; and when I see that my heart feels like busting.

Little wonder Stieffel and all those present were impressed. It is appropriate to add that neither the Indians nor the Government of the United States observed the provisions of this treaty.

The remainder of Stieffel's paintings have no such impact as the earlier ones, but nonetheless they are important, especially for their almost meticulous detail of camp and post life and terrain in the West. In that of the camp of peace commissioners he accurately depicts the various types of tentage of the Army at the time—the small slanting wall tents of the enlisted men, the wall tents of the individual officers, the large wall headquarters and officers' mess tents, and the familiar Sibleys, one of which is obviously being used for the guard. The escort wagons and ambulances are regulation transport of the period. The artist has even included a sentry walking post at the ration dump with fixed bayonet, a sound precaution against sticky



The Yellowstone River near Ft Keogh, Montana

Figure 10.—The Yellowstone River near Fort Keogh, Montana. (U.S.A.M. 38,491; Smithsonian photo 37925-1.)

red fingers. Two Indian camps are shown in the background, and the Indians, as would befit the atmosphere of a treaty council, are moving freely through the military camp to the apparent unconcern of the military.

The landscape of the Wichita Mountains from Medicine Bluffs (fig. 5) on the present-day Fort Sill reservation is noteworthy as a terrain sketch to anyone who has served at that post. I have ridden over this country many times, and the undulating prairie, the meandering of Medicine Creek, the Bluffs themselves—over the highest of which (left centerground) the Apache Geronimo did *not* ride his horse with the 7th Cavalry in full cry behind—Mount Hinds and lofty Mount Scott are remarkable in their accuracy when one considers that the painting must have been done from sketches made when Stieffel was on escort detail to the Indian Territory in 1869.³⁴

³⁴ Detail and orientation check closely with map of Fort Sill, Oklahoma, sheet 6353 III NW, scale 1:25,000, Army Map Service.

The two views of Fort Harker, Kansas (figs. 6, 7), now Ellsworth, must have been painted during 1870 and 1871 while Stieffel was on extra duty as a hospital attendant there. From an artistic standpoint they are the poorest of his work. His detail, however, more than compensates for any deficiencies as a draftsman and gives us an excellent concept of the physical layout and daily routine of a small post in the Southern Plains. The two views are from the east and south, and complement one another nicely. Headquarters, officers' quarters, and barracks, all of typical clapboard construction, are readily discernible, as are the stables, the latter being the long unfenestrated buildings. Even the barrack privies, an outdoor bake oven alongside a mess hall, and earth-covered powder magazines can be easily identified. The long rows of cordwood for cooking and heating were to be seen on any post of the period. In the view from the east (fig. 6) may be seen a detail of cavalrymen with led horses moving out for animal exercise past the camp of a transient unit with its standard tentage and transport. The high white



Figure 11.—Kiowa Chief Satanta, or White Bear. (Smithsonian photo BAE 1380-A.)

paling fence is difficult to place, being either an animal corral, in which case it would be much too high, or a forage yard, since no hay piles are visible elsewhere. Stieffel seems to have been considerably fascinated by the railroad (fig. 7) with its accompanying telegraph line running southwest of the fort, for again he paints in some detail, although this time with an almost childish conception. The "U.P.R.W.E.D." which he so carefully letters in identifies the line as the Union Pacific Railway, Eastern Division.³⁵ The naming of the engine "Osage"

³⁵ This was identified in Engineer Files, Cartographic Branch, National Archives.

was as typical of the period as the naming of individual commercial aircraft is today.

The last three paintings (figs. 8-10) fall in the period of Stieffel's service at Fort Keogh in the Department of Dakota. The fort, named for Captain Miles Keogh (who died with Custer in the Little Big Horn massacre) and originally called Cantonment Tongue River, was located at the confluence of the Tongue and Yellowstone Rivers near present-day Miles City, Montana.

The pictures of both the fort (fig. 8) and Miles City (fig. 9) are subject to check against extant photographs; they are amazing in their detail and accuracy.

The over-all layout of the fort conforms, and such minute details as the gable windows and chimneys of the officers' quarters on the left of the parade ground and the two-story verandas on the enlisted barracks opposite are absolutely correct.³⁶ The familiar stables, corral, wood piles, and hay piles—the latter surrounded by a stone wall as protection against grass fire in the dry months—are readily discernible (fig. 8). The low stone buildings and corral in the right centerground probably are part of the original structures of Cantonment Tongue River. The small shacks to the left of them probably are the homes of the civilian hangers-on who founded Miles City in 1876 after being ejected from the post by Col. Nelson Miles, the commander of the 5th Infantry. The first site of Miles City can be seen in the upper right corner on the banks of the Tongue. The town was moved across the river in 1877. The mounted drill in the foreground is difficult to explain in a period when and in an area where the troops were almost constantly in the field under combat conditions. Perhaps it is mere window dressing by the artist. It is entirely possible, however, that Stieffel has pictured elements of his own regiment, which was mounted from 1877 until after the surrender of Sitting Bull in 1881. Being basically infantry they would be most in need of training in mounted tactics. Then again, these could be legitimate cavalry whose commander thought had wandered too far from regulation movements during the unorthodox winter warfare they had been waging against the Indians.

The view of Miles City (fig. 9) has little importance in a military sense, but it is a fine contemporary view of a frontier town of the period. It is probably the product of a spring afternoon Stieffel spent along the banks of the Tongue. It was painted before 1880—a wooden bridge had replaced the ferry by that year³⁷—and probably as early as 1878, for the town grew rapidly and Stieffel pictures only two streets, Main and Park, running at right angles. The town is

correctly placed in a grove of cottonwoods, and low to the river as evidenced by the almost annual flooding of the streets.³⁸ Structures which can be readily identified, reading from left to right on Main Street, are the Diamond D corral visible near the ferry landing; the town stockade which Stieffel has either misplaced or which was later moved; Major Borchardt's store, the white two-story building; Broadwater, Hubbel and Co., the brown two-story structure next right; the Cottage Saloon at the corner of Main and Park Streets, just to the right of the flag pole; and Morris Cahn's drygoods emporium on Park Street, in the right centerground, that can be identified by Cahn's name on the false front.³⁹

A Note on Stieffel's Indians

In seven of his nine paintings Stieffel has executed his Indian subjects in colorful detail and with some care. Although he apparently did not know his subjects well enough to distinguish them by tribe, he does depict them in typical dress of the period. Many of them are wearing German silver ornaments of various designs about their necks, on strips of flannel attached to their hair pigtail-like, or as arm bands. At least four are wearing hair-pipe breast plates, a fact of interest to ethnologists,⁴⁰ and several wear the comical, Puritan style, tall black hats issued as annuity goods. The red and blue robes are of trades-good flannel, as probably are the leggings. Two wear buffalo robes with the skin side out and the hair side rolled over at the shoulder.⁴¹ Two, in the Fort Keogh picture (fig. 8) and the Yellowstone River landscape (fig. 10), wear robes of the familiar, colorfully striped Hudson Bay blanketing material. Arms are conventional—bows, quivered arrows, and pipe tomahawks, with a scattering of firearms. In the Yellowstone River landscape one discrepancy should be pointed out—the canoe; the Northern Plains Indians seldom used water transport, and then generally only in the form of rafts.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 137, 140.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 157, 163, and end paper map.

⁴⁰ Ewers, *op. cit.* (footnote 1), pp. 58–61, 1948.

⁴¹ Lower right in the Council Grove scene and in the foreground of the Fort Keogh picture.

³⁶ An over-all photographic view of the post is in Still Picture Branch, National Archives. For photos of the officers' quarters and barracks, see Brown and Felton, *op. cit.* (footnote 2), pp. 98, 128.

³⁷ See photo in Brown and Felton *op. cit.* (footnote 2), p. 135.